informed by the industrious Marino Sanuto how, at Venice in 1531 " there was performed by the Jews in their Ghetto a very fine Comedy: but no Christian was permitted to be present, by order of the Council of Ten". Ultimately, it seems that a permanent theatre was instituted in the Venetian Ghetto, where there were presented plays composed by writers not unknown to the outside world.

This practice certainly had some influence on the Italian theatre and indirectly on that of modern Europe generally. Jewish interest in the drama appears to have been particularly strong at Mantua, where the actors of the Ghetto were famous for their histrionic ability. Accordingly, during the sixteenth century, whenever it was desired to give a dramatic performance at the Court of the Gonzagas, in honour of some visiting Prince or Grandee, the obligation (and, incidentally, the expense) generally devolved upon the Jews. We are informed that on Friday the performances had to commence betimes, so that they would end before the Sabbath: while on Jewish feast-days they either had to be postponed, or else shorn of their most attractive features. Thus, at the formative period of European drama, when the influence of Italy was felt throughout Europe and Italy looked with interest to Mantua, the Jewish community of that city was closely associated with, if not responsible for, the dramatic performances at that Court.

The Jews of Mantua did not provide the actors only.

Leone de' Sommi Portaleone (by profession a scribe, by predilection a Hebrew Poet, and founder of a synagogue in his native city which existed for many generations) was a prolific writer of Italian prose and verse, and composed in addition several plays of the somewhat insipid pastoral character then fashionable —of course of a specifically non-Jewish nature. He was impresario